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**Office of the Administrative Director - Public Affairs Office - THE JUDICIARY • STATE OF HAWAII**

417 SOUTH KING STREET, ROOM 206C • ALI'ĪOLANI HALE • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-2902

TELEPHONE (808) 539-4909 • FAX (808) 539-4801 • [www.courts.state.hi.us](http://www.courts.state.hi.us)

**Thomas R. Keller**  
ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR

**Walter M. Ozawa**  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR

**Susan Pang Gochros**  
DIVISION CHIEF, INTERGOVERNMENTAL  
AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS DIVISION

**Marsha E. Kitagawa**  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIRECTOR

## **NEWS RELEASE**

For Media Release November 7, 2003

### **JUDICIARY AND BAR ASSOCIATION SPONSOR CONFERENCE ON OPENNESS IN THE COURTS**

The Hawai'i State Judiciary and the Hawai'i State Bar Association today held a conference to address the issue of enhancing public trust and confidence in the justice system by improving transparency in the courts. The conference, entitled "Openness in the Courts," was attended by all state justices and judges, as well as representatives from the legislative and executive branches, media, bar, and general public.

The conference was premised on the belief that trust and confidence in the judicial system is enhanced when members of the public can learn, through observation, how the court system works. A recent study funded by the State Justice Institute and conducted by Ward Research found that focus group participants comprised of the public, media, and attorneys in Hawai'i are not well informed about many court processes, which contributes to the perception that the Judiciary is "closed" to outsiders. (Ward Research's complete report is available on the Judiciary's website at [www.courts.state.hi.us](http://www.courts.state.hi.us).)

In 2002, Chief Justice Ronald T. Y. Moon appointed a committee to determine where stakeholders believed more transparency in the judicial system was needed and how best to achieve results within the limits of existing laws and ethical rules. Volunteer committee members from the Hawai'i State Bar Association, League of Women Voters, Judicial Council, Honolulu Advertiser, Honolulu Star-Bulletin, and Judiciary planned the conference to address some of the issues identified in the Ward Research report.

Three nationally-known experts - Robert Alsdorf, judge of the King County Superior Court, Linda Deutsch, Associated Press Special Correspondent, and Leonard Edwards, judge of the Santa Clara Superior Court - spoke on issues such as the extent to which judges can or should comment on cases, openness in trial proceedings, and access to court records. Each guest speaker also participated on a panel with other subject-matter experts from the local community to respond to questions from the audience.

"Public trust in the way we do business is based, in part, on an open Judiciary, which means the judicial system must have some degree of transparency," said Chief Justice Moon. "Today's conference provided a unique opportunity for the media, the bench, the bar, and representatives from the general public to learn from each other, to engage in constructive dialogue focused on the three main discussion topics, and to brainstorm viable solutions for increased openness in the judicial system that will lead to enhancing public trust and confidence in that system."

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Contact: Marsha E. Kitagawa 539-4909

